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Developing a new ITE programme: a story of compliant and disruptive narratives across different cultural spaces

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ABSTRACT

Increasing global pressure to enhance teacher quality has led to increasing numbers of new ITE programmes, yet there is a dearth of policy studies interrogating exactly how both macro and micro-policy processes combine to shape the development of these programmes. This article examines one particular new programme – the MSc Transformative Learning and Teaching (MSc TLT) – and rather than presenting one coherent narrative of programme development, identifies three distinct cultural spaces in which ITE exists: the political space, the professional space and the university space. An analysis is provided of the way(s) in which the development of the MSc TLT has been supported or resisted in each of these cultural spaces. The analysis challenges the dualist notion of ‘official’ v. ‘counter’ narratives, instead revealing a series of compliant or disruptive narratives across the various spaces, contributing a new way of understanding the development of new ITE programmes.

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, initial teacher education (ITE) has become an increasingly important political lever across and beyond Europe, with the European Commission (2017) stating in fairly blunt terms that ‘the quality of teacher education requires more attention’ (p. 8). From the general OECD meta-narrative that ‘teachers matter’ (OECD, 2005) to more recent calls focusing on the need for ‘the allocation of quality teachers, and not just more teachers, to underserved students’ (OECD, 2018, p. 13), it is evident that ITE functions as an indicator of both economic wellbeing and political popularity. Over recent years it has become increasingly politicised, with Wiseman (2012) arguing that ‘in more cases than not, policy emerges quickly and without the benefit of research before or after mandated innovations are implemented’ (p. 90). The absence of proper research is further compounded by a neoliberal predilection towards ‘modes of governance, discipline, and regulation that are totalizing in their insistence that all aspects of social life be determined, shaped, and weighted through market-driven measures’ (Giroux, 2013, p. 459).

Clearly, then, ITE policy development is highly politicised; it is not an objective science, and nor is it constituted to serve one clear, agreed purpose. Given this complexity, it makes sense to think of the development of ITE policy as a process of social construction, which can arguably be best understood through detailed analyses of ‘instances’ or cases, which attend to the importance of context, and allow for the exploration of what Darling-Hammond (2017) argues is a ‘system of teacher development’ within national or state boundaries. However, while Darling-Hammond conceptualizes the ‘system’ as including ‘multiple, coherent and complementary components associated with recruiting, developing, and retaining talented individuals to support the overall goal of ensuring that each school is populated by effective teachers.’ (ibid. p. 294), what this article contributes is an example of the revelations that can be gleaned from a more micro-level examination of the systemically-influenced policymaking process borne out within one particular programme. Crucially, the analysis presented here focuses on the development of a new ITE programme rather than focusing, as is more common, on the impact of the programme once established. Greater knowledge of the micro policy interactions at this stage will help us to counter Wiseman’s concerns about policy being implemented reactively without recourse to research; a

concern not unique to the Scottish context. Indeed, this approach to micro-level policy concerns at the development stage provides an approach to ITE policy analysis. It also challenges Darling-Hammond's (ibid.) conceptualisation of teacher development systems as necessarily containing 'coherent and complementary components'. This article offers a way of conceptualizing the policy process in order to understand the interplay of complex local contexts within which there are multiple policy actors representing sometimes different priorities. This level of understanding is necessary if we are to truly understand how to negotiate multiple influences and demands in developing new ITE programmes which are both research and context informed.

This article therefore presents a micro-level policy analysis of one particular new ITE programme – the MSc in Transformative Learning and Teaching offered at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. The analysis offers a means of understanding the policy development process of the new programme within what might broadly be considered to be an 'argumentative policy inquiry' approach (Fischer & Gottweis, 2012). Argumentative policy inquiry falls under the umbrella of 'discursive approaches', approaches which Durnova et al. (2016) argue share three key premises: they acknowledge 'that policy is about political argumentation, that argumentation is a deep epistemological issue that changes mainstream objectivism, and that argumentation requires placing interpretation and emotion back into the research agenda' (p. 36). These three premises shape the analysis presented in this article.

CONTEXT

The MSc TLT was conceived prior to the current political demand in Scotland¹ for 'new and innovative [ITE] routes' (Cabinet Minister, 2016), but its passage must be considered within this recent policy demand. In 2014 the Head of School at the Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh, approached Scottish Government to seek support to devise Scotland's first two-year ITE programme; an ITE programme which would uniquely qualify graduates to teach across the primary/secondary transition, and which would be underpinned by an explicit social justice/transformative pedagogy. Following significant delay in coming to a decision, the programme development was given the go-ahead in March 2015, on the condition that it would recruit its first cohort ready to start in September 2017. In the period between go-ahead and commencement, the Cabinet Secretary for Education (who also happens to be the Deputy First Minister for Scotland), challenged the universities currently providing ITE in Scotland to propose a package of 'new and innovative routes' which would seek to address the following challenges:

- Increased numbers of teachers in shortage subjects such as STEM and Home Economics
- Teachers who can work between primary and secondary sectors to support the transition phase
- Increased opportunities for specialism within the primary workforce, e.g. STEM and modern languages
- PGDE and induction year combined more coherently, and potentially over a shorter timescale
- Opportunities for teachers to complete a full Masters degree during ITE or the induction year

¹ Scotland is a part of the United Kingdom, but has its own Parliament with significant devolved powers, one of which includes education.

- Increased availability of distance or work-based routes into teaching
- Increased numbers of black and minority ethnic teachers, and of male teachers in the primary sector
- Increased numbers of teachers able to teach through the medium of Gaelic

These challenges were principally, although perhaps not exclusively, driven by workforce concerns, and perhaps because of this, the resulting package reveals a lack of underpinning ideological coherence: it consists of both extended Masters-level programmes which precede a full induction year, as well as ‘fast-track’ programmes which combine the PGDE and induction years. Although all the proposed new routes would have to gain GTCS accreditation, they were not required to draw explicitly on a research-based foundation, leaving the way open for quick-fix proposals to a temporary workforce problem, rather than a set of routes coalescing around a shared understanding of the purpose of teacher education and the most likely ways of achieving these purposes.

THE MSc TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING AND TEACHING

The MSc in Transformative Learning and Teaching (MSc TLT) is a two-year Masters programme in initial teacher education, qualifying graduates to teach as either generalist teachers in Nursery to Secondary 3 (3-14 year-olds), or as subject specialists in Primary 5 – Secondary 6 (9-17 year-olds). It is unique in Scotland, being the first programme to enable beginning teachers to qualify with a Masters award and to be able to teach across the primary/secondary transition. In some of the most successful education systems worldwide, teaching is becoming a Masters-level profession (OECD, 2018) and recent policy in Scotland has stated that all qualified teachers should engage in continuing learning at Masters-level throughout their careers (Donaldson, 2010). The policy context is therefore ripe for new teachers to be given the opportunity to study at Masters-level from the outset of their careers.

Crucially, the MSc TLT programme aspires to support a transformative agenda for learners and schools, and therefore seeks to support the development of an ‘activist’ orientation in its graduates. Sachs (2003) describes an activist teaching profession as ‘an educated and politically astute one’ (p. 154). Activist teachers are those who have a well-informed commitment to social justice, and to challenging racist, sexist, homophobic, disablist and other structural injustices and inequalities through their teaching. Activist teachers seek to progress their own learning in ways that will enable them to teach *all* children, seeing the education process as something that should be collaborative, transparent and relevant to the community in which learners live. To this end, students on the MSc programme engage in a professionally authentic experience where they are supported in taking responsibility for their own professional learning, working as part of both university and school communities throughout the programme, enabling genuine integration of theory and practice.

The programme aims for its graduates to:

1. Have substantive pedagogical breadth and depth of subject knowledge in either a secondary subject or in nursery/primary education, together with the ability to teach across the P5 – S3 transition phase;
2. Have specialised knowledge in teaching literacy and numeracy;
3. Understand the politically contested notions of social justice and sustainability, and be able to draw on this knowledge in complex professional settings;

4. Employ systematic, evidence-based practice in their teaching, demonstrating an ability to inquire creatively into their own and others' practices in order to impact positively on learners' development and attainment;
5. Be digitally and statistically literate, demonstrating an ability to use these skills to enhance pedagogical practice and communication with pupils, parents, colleagues and other professionals;
6. Have the ability to lead on innovative practice in their chosen field, adopting an activist orientation to teaching;
7. Be global in outlook, demonstrating critical awareness of international perspectives on education and schooling.

The research-informed design of the programme has resulted in a number of key features designed to support its transformative and activist aspirations. Three particular elements of the programme design, we believe, will allow us to turn these aspirations into reality. These elements are: its Masters-level engagement; its assessment philosophy; and its approach to site-based learning.

The ***Masters-level engagement*** is fundamentally about supporting a critical, activist orientation to teaching, rather than being simply about higher-level knowledge acquisition. Importantly for the MSc TLT, the Masters-level nature of the learning is not confined to university-based learning, but sits across the programme as a whole, in both university and site-based learning contexts. This is apparent, structurally, in the final assessment which is a professional viva, comprising submission of a portfolio of evidence and an oral exam, in which the student makes their case for having met the General Teaching Council for Scotland's 'Standard for Provisional Registration'. This approach draws on the 'clinical praxis exam' established in the University of Melbourne (Kameniar et al., 2017). The 'professional Masters' approach in the MSc TLT supports the ***assessment philosophy*** underpinning the programme as a whole, which sees all assessment activities as attending to four key principles:

1. Professionally authentic
2. Sustainable
3. Collaborative
4. Student-driven

Fundamentally, the programme team believes that assessment is 'the most powerful lever teachers have to influence the way students respond to a course and behave as learners' (Gibbs, 1999, p. 41), and is persuaded Brubaker's (2010) claim that the 'pervasive and insidious ways in which teachers resort to grades to maintain control of students' (p. 258) has the capacity to undermine egalitarian and democratic ideals. In practice, this means that assessment tasks on the programme are not prescribed; rather, they are agreed with the student cohort in response to discussions about the kinds of tasks that will most likely facilitate their learning. The assessment tasks and detailed criteria are then co-constructed. The assessment philosophy requires students to view themselves first and foremost as a cohort of beginning professionals, and to use assessment to help themselves and each other to become as good as they possibly can be rather than to adopt a competitive race for the highest individual grades. This approach to ITE student assessment involves considerable understanding, and use, of formative assessment; a practice that results in students developing their own skills in this area in terms of their work with pupils in schools (Hamodi et al., 2017).

In line with the student-focused and professionally authentic nature of the assessment philosophy, the **site-based learning** (SBL) element of the programme is designed to support teachers to learn in ways that will be sustainable beyond graduation. The SBL element draws heavily on Darling-Hammond's (2006) ideas about 'powerful programs', where she concludes that 'the most powerful programs require students to spend extensive time in the field throughout the entire program, examining and applying the concepts and strategies they are simultaneously learning about in their courses' (p. 307). This process of truly understanding and using theoretical concepts in practice contexts, is commonly understood as the integration of theory and practice, and is seen both in Europe (Livingston and Flores, 2017) and beyond (Beck, 2018) as an ongoing challenge for teacher education. Indeed, in their review of the last forty years of this journal, Livingston & Flores (*ibid.*) note that this challenge has featured in articles in each decade of the journal's existence, signifying that a 'solution' remains somewhat elusive. In response to this challenge, the MSc TLT has students learning in school contexts for two days per week throughout the programme, with some block periods too. Importantly, though, we attend to Cochran-Smith et al's (2015) warning that there is 'a lack of empirical evidence to support the view that simply spending more time in schools necessarily results in better teacher learning' (p. 11). We therefore conceive of SBL as a key component of every course within the programme, and not simply as a discrete 'placement course'.

The cluster-based structure of our SBL, where students are placed in groups in a school cluster over a whole academic session, allows them to explore and understand the wider community in which their pupils live and learn, rather than simply (or not so simply!) learn to juggle the demands within an individual classroom. Drawing on a body of recent literature, Lee (2018, p. 119) concludes that 'teachers become highly qualified through their commitment to and immersion in the community cultures of their schools, while at the same time focusing on the acquisition of professional skills'. This kind of approach to SBL also aligns with the OECD's (2018) analysis of features of teacher education in the highest performing systems in the PISA league tables, although they recognise that this kind of approach does require considerable investment of resources upfront (p. 50). Importantly, this approach to SBL explicitly rejects previously entrenched hierarchies of knowledge, instead combining teacher, student teacher, university and community knowledge in a much more democratic way, providing what Beck (2018) would describe as a third-space for teacher education: 'a collaborative space in which all stakeholders potentially stand to benefit' (p. 3).

Bearing in mind these three key elements of programme design, the paper now goes on to consider how the process of policy development in relation to the development of the MSc TLT might best be understood.

CONCEPTUALISING THE POLICY PROCESS

Transformative learning, and its associated link to notions of activist professionalism, suggest a challenge to entrenched norms. Often this type of challenge is associated with a so-called 'counter-narrative', with its undertones of subversion. Peters & Lankshear (1996) propose that 'Counternarratives... counter not merely (or even necessarily), the grand narratives, but also (or instead), the "official" and "hegemonic" narratives of everyday life.' (p. 2). Teachers, and teacher educators, are increasingly living in a vortex of these conflicting narratives, where increasingly performative demands are placed on them and where 'education suffers when teachers must live

dividedly and deeply so, when they consistently find themselves needing to engage in actions contrary to their most fundamental beliefs about learning and teaching in order to satisfy one or another set of externally imposed mandates' (Bullough, 2009, p. 5). For Bullough (ibid.), counternarratives are the stories of real teachers who live under and within these conflicts, again suggesting that counternarratives exist only in contradiction to meta-narratives.

The experience of developing the MSc TLT suggests that this analysis of meta and counter narratives is at best incomplete, and at worst masks the challenge by presenting dominant and counter narratives as an easily identifiable dualism. Instead, the analysis below draws on a conceptualisation of action taking place simultaneously in different policy spaces (in this case political, professional and university spaces), and acknowledges that rather than a meta-narrative of 'official' and 'counter' narratives, each space has its own set(s) of policy narratives, and the policy development process can therefore be understood as a fluid web of compliant and disruptive narratives. Importantly, something that can be construed as a compliant narrative in one space, or even in one area within one space, can be construed as disruptive in another space. The policy development process therefore proceeds through a sometimes intentional, and sometimes unintentional, privileging of particular narratives in order to negotiate its way through particular policy spaces. This analysis infers an active and deliberate orientation on the part of the person or people driving the 'innovative' policy, and as such, understands the policy process as a communicative act. Fischer & Gottweis (2012) helpfully conceptualise this as 'argumentative policy inquiry' (API), an approach which 'challenges the belief that policy analysis can be value-free, technical project' (p. 2). This approach fits well with the idea of policy development happening in different spaces, spaces which are, of course, inhabited by people, as API 'embraces an understanding of human action as intermediated and embedded in symbolically rich social and cultural contexts' (ibid.).

The analysis below begins by outlining the contemporary policy environment in each of the three spaces identified, before going on to analyse how compliant and disruptive narratives were employed as part of the MSc TLT development process in each space. Narratives are explored in relation to three key aspects of the MSc programme outlined earlier: its Masters-level calibration; its unique approach to site-based learning; and its student-centred assessment philosophy.

THREE POLICY SPACES

This analysis is based on the identification of three policy spaces within which programme development took place: the political space; the professional space; and the university space. These policy spaces are each fundamental to the development of any ITE programme, and each is governed by a different set of quality assurance and/or compliance processes; crucially, they are therefore not spaces that can be easily by-passed or ignored. The three space are outlined briefly below.

The political space

The political space in Scottish ITE is driven by the Scottish Government, and in particular, by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney. This space is currently shaped by a narrative around 'closing the gap'; something that the First Minister herself has staked her professional reputation on, making the following public proclamation in a speech in August 2015: "Let me be clear – I want to be judged on this. If you are not, as First Minister, prepared to put your

neck on the line on the education of our young people then what are you prepared to. It really matters.” She went on to say that she aimed to “close that attainment gap [the gap in attainment between children from the most and least well-off families] completely.” This explicit and ambitious agenda drives almost all current political decisions regarding education in Scotland. However, recent press coverage has highlighted what is being termed a ‘recruitment crisis’, with hundreds of posts going vacant across Scotland, although shortages are focused in particular subjects and in particular geographical areas. This workforce ‘crisis’ stimulated a cross-party parliamentary inquiry, led by the Education and Skills Committee of the Scottish Parliament. With an initial remit to explore the reasons for the workforce crisis, the inquiry moved quickly to position teacher education as being in crisis and requiring strong and directive central leadership in order to improve. The Committee published its report in 2017, pointing to areas where some individual teachers said they felt underprepared, and calling for ‘... the Scottish Government to work with the teacher training [sic] institutions and the General Teaching Council for Scotland to take urgent action to implement the necessary improvements to the teacher training programme in Scotland’ (Scottish Parliament, 2017, p. 31). This overall tone of the report suggests a view of ITE as the place where teachers must learn everything they will need to know about being a teacher; this is in contrast to the position emanating from the OECD’s analysis of PISA data, which asserts that ‘initial teacher education [should be] conceived as providing the foundation for ongoing learning, rather than producing ready-made professionals (OECD, 2018, p. 31).

The post-Donaldson² narrative of partnership has quietly been side-lined (see Kennedy & Doherty, 2012, for discussion of the ‘partnership as a panacea’ period), to be replaced by a much more centrally directed form of governance which increasingly relies on the achievement of performance indicators as published in the National Improvement Framework (Scottish Government, 2018).

The professional space

The professional space in Scotland, principally governed by the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), is also heavily influenced by the teacher unions; the Educational Institute for Scotland (EIS) in particular, of which 80% of teachers in Scotland are currently members. While independent since 2015, the GTCS has been under pressure to support the Government’s reform agenda through becoming increasingly ‘flexible’ in its ITE accreditation procedures. As well as accrediting ITE programmes on a rolling basis, GTCS currently maintains an agreed set of entry requirements for applicants to all ITE programmes (see <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/web/FILES/about-gtcs/memorandum-on-entry-requirements-to-programmes-of-ite-in-scotland-0413.pdf>) and is responsible for the maintenance of a suite of professional standards which includes the ‘Standard for Provisional Registration’ which all beginning teachers must meet on completing their ITE programme (for more information about GTCS, see Hamilton, 2018). The GTCS Council comprises thirty-seven members, of which nineteen are teachers, drawn from both class teacher and headteacher constituencies. While officially an independent body, GTCS is still fairly heavily influenced by union membership, although Hamilton (2018, p. 81) claims that GTCS is in danger of

² The ‘Donaldson Report’ (*Teaching Scotland’s Future*) was the report of a review of teacher education across the entire career span. Published in 2010, it resulted in fifty recommendations, among which was a very strong push towards greater partnership working between schools, local authorities and universities, in supporting early phase teacher education in particular.

becoming more influenced by Scottish Government than by the unions, as other policy developments dictate that they work even closer together than previously was the case.

The university space

All teacher education in Scotland is currently led by universities, following a process of 'universitisation' (Hulme & Kennedy, 2015) in the nineteen nineties in which all the former colleges of education merged with local universities. The university space relevant to the development of ITE programmes, inhabits two guises: the first being the higher education sector as a whole, and the second being the individual institutional context. In terms of the overarching higher education space, there are increasing performativity demands in the shape of two national accountability exercises: the 'Research Excellence Framework' (REF) and the more recently introduced 'Teaching Excellence Framework' (TEF), both of which 'measure' and compare performance, and report publicly. These are two very contemporary and prominent examples of 'policy technologies' (Ball, 2001) which inadvertently serve to help shape teacher education in specific ways. In the English context, Gale (2007, p. 473) warned that:

'The development of tightly organised modules and programmes, with detailed performance criteria written into them, suggest the existence of a teacher education sector whose graduates will need to measure up to what are quite specific and clearly defined behavioural objectives.'

This warning is timely in Scotland today, and the existence of these performative levers, alongside widespread staffing 'rationalisation', has led to university-based teacher educators feeling increasingly squeezed and under pressure to perform an increasingly wide-ranging set of duties, with increasingly fewer resources. This performatively-focused environment, in which research performance is still arguably prioritised over teaching performance, leading to casualisation of the workforce and an increase in 'teaching only' contracts (Murray, 2015) has led to schools of education being seen as inferior to other schools/departments in the university, further limiting the power of teacher education academics to shape university-wide policy and discourse. Murray (ibid.) points out that this varies across universities, particularly between so-called 'ancient' and 'new universities'. Despite the variation in the extent to which universities value teacher education as part of their portfolio, Menter (2017) points out that education systems deemed to be 'high performing' globally, favour significant involvement of universities in initial teacher education (as opposed to locating it principally in schools).

Overlapping spaces

The analysis presented here requires understanding and appreciation of the distinctive nature of each of these spaces, but it also requires appreciation of the ways in which they overlap. Going back to Fischer & Gottweis' (2012) description of API acknowledging explicitly the importance of human interaction in the policy process, it is worth point out that in a country the size of Scotland (with a population of approximately 5.2 million), many of the lead figures in key stakeholder organisations have worked in other stakeholder organisations, and are well known to each other.

REPRESENTATION OF KEY ELEMENTS OF THE PROGRAMME IN EACH POLICY SPACE

The following section provides a description and analysis of compliant and disruptive narratives employed in each of the three distinct policy spaces outlined earlier.

Masters-level nature of the programme

The Masters-level nature of the programme was originally proposed in recognition that teaching is a complex and challenging process, and that to prepare graduate teachers in the traditional 9-month 'professional graduate diploma in education' (PGDE) route does not allow a lot of time and scope to develop deep thinking and confident practice. However, the Government's agenda in promoting Masters level ITE routes appears to be more to do with a growing international trend in 'high performing' countries, as identified through benchmarking league tables such as PISA; reflecting a policy-borrowing agenda. Thus, in proposing and promoting a Masters-level route, we drew on a discourse of international benchmarking, thereby providing a compliant narrative within the political space.

The narrative around the Masters-level nature of the programme was, however, differently understood within the professional space where it was acknowledged that the increasing demands on teachers to exhibit yet greater levels of so-called 'professionalism' within a context of increasingly challenging social conditions, thereby requiring greater levels of criticality. Indeed, within the professional sphere, a narrative around criticality and its links with transformative teaching and learning and an activist disposition, gave rise to a compliant narrative that sought to further promote teacher professionalism. This narrative is very much in line with the messages in the well-received 'Donaldson Report' of 2010, which sought to 're-professionalise' teaching through a series of changes to teacher development including for the first time, a public statement of the desirability of Masters-level learning for teachers, which included the recommendation that 'Masters level credits should be built into initial teacher education qualifications, induction year activities and CPD beyond the induction year, with each newly-qualified teacher having a 'Masters account' opened for them' (Donaldson, 2010, p. 76). A review of the impact of the Donaldson Report published by the Scottish Government in 2016, found that only 19% of teachers who responded to this element of the survey (n=6048) had undertaken, or were currently, undertaking, professional learning at Masters level. The Scottish Government continues to view Masters-level qualified teachers as an important part of its strategy, and continues to include as one of the key measures in the 'National Improvement Framework' (Scottish Government, 2018), the number of teachers in Scotland with Masters-level qualifications.

So, while the MSc TLT programme team shared a very specific set of values around Masters level criticality along the lines of Giroux's (2013) belief that 'pedagogy should be rooted in the practice of freedom – in those ethical and political formations that expand democratic underpinnings and principles of both the self and the broader social order' (p. 463), the Masters-level nature of the MSc TLT programme, at face value, was nonetheless seen as a broadly compliant narrative within the political and professional spaces. Within the university space, however, the narrative presented proved to be a somewhat disruptive one, challenging long-held fundamental assumptions about professional/vocational programmes and their fit, or otherwise, with the traditional notion of Masters-level study in an elite university. In particular, the notion of professional competence being calibrated at Masters-level did not fit easily with a traditional view of the Masters dissertation as a measurement of research competence. The human dimension in this space includes both academic

(from outwith the discipline of education) and professional services colleagues, and while each has their own area of expertise, neither had expertise in professional teacher education, and many of their assumptions were based on popular myths about what constitutes a good teacher.

Assessment approach

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this narrative was almost entirely absent from the political space. It might be conjectured that this is because actors within the political space see their roles as strategic, and see assessment as the nuts and bolts of university and professional spaces. Taking a positive spin on the situation, it could be suggested that this absence of narrative in the political space demonstrates trust in the rigour of existing quality assurance systems governed by professional and university stakeholders.

In the professional space, the proposed 'professional viva' certainly challenged norms. 'Normal' practice in all ITE programmes in Scotland involves 'assessed visits' during placement, increasingly carried out in partnership between university tutor and class teacher mentor, with the student teacher being told if they have met the Standard for Provisional Registration or not. The MSc TLT turns this on its head, arguing that the student teachers themselves need to be able to judge their own professional competence accurately and not rely on an 'expert' to make that judgement for them. This is very much in line with Boud's (2000) concept of sustainable assessment, which 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of students to meet their own future learning needs' (p. 151). Discussion of the assessment philosophy and proposed practices prompted significant discussion at the programme accreditation event with GTCS, and while it is fair to say that it disturbed norms, it was most certainly not unilaterally unwelcome. Use of a deeply academic, well-supported argument to support the proposed assessment practices seemed to provide adequate evidence to convince the GTCS panel that the proposals should be supported.

Rather surprisingly, the research-informed and academically argued approach to assessment, which might have been assumed to have been a compliant narrative within the university space, turned out to be a somewhat disruptive narrative, particularly within the formal spaces of programme approval, and even more so in university-wide contexts than within the school of education. This might, in part, be related to the university's elite status, its global reputation in terms of the perceived quality of its degrees, and the desirability, particularly amongst overseas students, for a Masters degree with distinction, perceived as having significant cultural and academic capital attached to it. The idea of a flatter, collaborative and more democratic approach to assessment is at odds with the longstanding narrative shared not only within the university, but also reflected back on it from outwith. The university committees were particularly exercised by the suggestion that the MSc TLT programme was attempting to reject hegemonic grading practices which 'undermines the sense of collective solidarity and mutual responsibility between students that democratic education seeks to foster' (Tannock, 2015, p. 1350), seeing this as a threat to existing 'meritocratic' grading practices.

Site-based learning

The development of the site-based learning element of the programme was rooted very heavily in partnership working with colleagues in schools and local authorities. The policy emphasis on partnership working in teacher education in Scotland, had been a very important and central plank

of Government policy agenda post-Donaldson and so therefore something that Government would be unlikely to reject. Within the political space, we also used the research-informed nature of the site-based learning element of the programme to illustrate our seriousness in competing internationally with other highly-esteemed programmes. Much of the literature we drew on came from the US, Australia and New Zealand, presenting a narrative which suggested that we are at the forefront of international practice, 'competing' favourably with other internationally esteemed institutions, thereby promoting Scotland as a leader in ITE development. The actual shape of our site-based learning approach, and the aspirations we have for it pedagogically, were of less importance in presenting a compliant political narrative around international standing.

The professional space proved to be a bit more complex, where compliant and disruptive narratives again sat side by side. While key stakeholders in education were used to a narrative of partnership, some of our programme proposals proved to be a little unsettling in terms of their deviation from the norm. In particular, the cross-sector/transition element of the programme that qualifies all graduates to work across upper primary and lower secondary, demanded new approaches to site-based learning, with generalist student teachers being placed in secondary schools which run on subject-based structures, and our subject specialist student teachers being placed in upper primary classes which run with integrated curriculum models. The site-based learning model also entailed a new role being developed, that of 'cluster tutor' – a teacher from one of the cluster schools, whose time is recompensed by the university, and who carries out a local tutoring role involving direct working with students and negotiating individual placements with schools and teachers in their cluster. While this conception of this role proved to be a novelty, the idea of such a role also proved to be quite attractive to many teachers interested in a more hands-on school-based teacher educator role.

The partnership agenda was again used to support a somewhat radical approach to site-based learning, and one which would require the programme to place students in SBL context outwith the administrative structures used by every other ITE programme in Scotland; a centralised system run by GTCS. To an extent then, this was a disruptive policy proposal, but the narrative that was shaped to support it was positioned as a compliant narrative in relation to the importance of partnership working and school/local authority buy-in to this new approach. Garnering support from school and local authority partners allowed a stronger and more persuasive narrative to be presented than we might otherwise have managed had it been presented from a purely university perspective. The research-informed nature of the fairly radical SBL plans was again employed as a compliant narrative within the university space; a space which understandably values research-based approaches to teaching. And again, when challenges to the proposed new SBL model were raised, the partnership narrative was employed as being consistent with the highly-valued stakeholder engagement and impact agendas prominent across higher education contexts within and beyond the context of teacher education.

RECONCILING THE NARRATIVES AND MOVING FORWARD

The above analysis illustrates how not only were different elements presented differently within the different policy spaces, but in some cases, an element of the programme could be presented through both compliant and disruptive narratives within the one policy space, for example, the 'professional viva' assessment of professional competence. What this shows is that it is not

therefore completely necessary to present a compliant narrative in order to meet quality assurance requirements, although in some cases disruptive narratives were subsequently softened in order to comply with the requirements of particular policy spaces, for example, the deeply collaborative nature of some of the proposed assessment practices.

Ultimately, what this analysis does is to challenge the more restrictive notions of official versus counter narratives, proposing that in reality, different spaces have their own histories, practices and discourses in which different aspects of the programme proved to be supported or challenged. It highlights the socially constructed, communicative nature of policy processes, highlighted in the argumentative policy inquiry approach. Durnova et al. (2016) make a convincing case for the applicability of discursive approaches to the analysis of social policy:

‘...it is not possible to consider concepts such as “interest,” “ideas,” “instruments,” or even “value” as objective and independent variables which can explain policy processes in the same manner as physical science explains object movement through independent variables. The discursive paradigm views each of these concepts as social constructs which depend on how meaning is produced and used by actors during the process. It implies that defining both the problem and the solution are two sides of the same coin of the policy process.’
(p. 36)

The positioning of policy problems and policy solutions as ‘two sides of the same coin’ is particularly apt in the case of ITE policy analysis as it makes explicit the idea that positioning ITE as a ‘policy problem’ (as evidenced above in the discussion of the international meta-narrative of teacher education quality) is as much worthy of analysis and interrogation as the resulting policy solutions, and that the two cannot be separated. Again, this is most definitely not only an issue for Scotland.

The analysis above demonstrates more compliant than disruptive narratives being presented across all three policy spaces. So, at what point, and why, would we present a disruptive narrative rather than trying to find a convincing compliant narrative? Perhaps the clearest example of this in relation to the assessment plans within the university policy space. In this example, a narrative was presented that appealed to compliance in relation to the research-informed nature of the proposal being presented. However, for the university, the research-informed nature was not sufficiently convincing to outweigh the perceived challenge to well-established ways of working and a (however unlikely) threat to reputation. Thus, what was perceived originally as a compliant narrative turned out to be a disruptive narrative, again illustrating the subjective and discursive nature of social policy processes.

A compliant narrative can only be understood to be compliant or disruptive in relation to a particular policy space; the compliance or otherwise of any particular narrative therefore needs to be understood within a context. Thus, compliant and disruptive narratives should be seen as exceedingly unstable and entirely contingent. This observation, illustrated through the analysis above, demonstrates why notions of official and counter narratives, or homogenous notions of ‘dominant discourses’, are not sufficiently nuanced conceptual explanations of what is a much more complex, socially-mediated and contextually-dependent process.

This article therefore contributes a new perspective on understanding teacher education policy; not only in terms of the importance of national contexts, but also the importance of understanding and being able to work productively within different policy spaces within national contexts. As supra-national bodies such as the OECD and the European Commission increasingly seek to homogenise teacher education policy (Czerniawski, 2010), our capacity to conceptualise and interrogate policymaking at a national and institutional level becomes even more pressing. Importantly, however, we need to find rigorous and illuminating ways to do that, to enable the teacher education field to meet some of the challenges laid out by Sleeter (2014) and others:

‘The problem [...] is that the weight of the research, being fragmented, often narrowly focused, and usually not directly connected to a shared research agenda on teacher education, does not position teacher educators strongly to craft an evidence-based narrative about teacher education’ (ibid., p. 152)

While Sleeter writes from a US perspective, the points she makes are pertinent to the global field of teacher education research; that despite numerous calls over the past ten or more years, we still need to do more to address the challenge of fragmented research and a lack of cumulative theory-building. Linking this teacher education-specific concern to wider concerns around social policy analysis, McConnell (2010) makes a persuasive argument that policy exists in three realms: processes, programs and politics, and that these realms are not equally well considered in most policy analysis. What this present analysis offers is a potential means of generating a cumulative body of knowledge in teacher education which also addresses wider policy analysis concerns about how/where policies are deemed to be ‘successful’.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

To go back to Durnova’s (2016) contention that ‘[policy] argumentation requires placing interpretation and emotion back into the research agenda’ (p. 36), I close this article with a personal reflection, in my capacity as the Programme Director responsible for leading the programme development analysed above. First, it should be acknowledged that weaving in and out of these three policy spaces, presenting both compliant and disruptive narratives, is an emotionally exhausting experience, involving considerable highs and lows. In some ways this mirrors the experiences I expect my students to have, and indeed at interview each candidate was asked about their resilience in relation to being trailblazers for a new way of becoming a teacher. It ultimately illustrates for me something I’ve long known about in relation to policy processes, that the process is fundamentally a social, human one; most definitely ripe for argumentative policy inquiry. Indeed, I might perhaps go further to suggest that in an attempt to ‘compete’ with established positivist paradigms in policy analysis, such as the ‘rational approach’ (see Birkland, 2016), we are in danger of suppressing the human stories of policy which reveal so much about how and why things actually happen. If we can harness our understanding of these human interactions within different policy spaces, then we can build the capacity not only to analyse policy once it is in place, but to actively shape the way we, as actors in the teacher education policy arena, shape our own field.

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